



THE EARLY COLLEGE PLANNING INITIATIVE (ECPI)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

WHAT IS ECPI?

The Early College Planning Initiative (ECPI) is a program that provides informational workshops to help the families of middle and high school students learn more about how to prepare academically and financially for college. To test the effectiveness of these workshops in helping families, we are also gathering information for a research study about whether and how parents decide to save for college.

WHO IS CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?

Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Stanford University School of Education are conducting the study in partnership with uAspire (formerly ACCESS), a non-profit college access program that works within all public and select charter and private high schools in Boston, and Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA), a not-for-profit state authority that works to make higher education more accessible and affordable for students and families in Massachusetts. The goal of all of the participating organizations is to help families and their students prepare for college.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A SCHOOL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

If you give us permission, we will invite the parents of your students to attend an ECPI presentation at your school. We will ask you to help choose the best methods of communication with your families and schedule a good time for the event. However, we will take care of all the necessary planning, outreach, and set up. We do ask that several members of your staff attend the event to help us greet the parents.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

Participation for parents is completely voluntary. If they choose to attend an ECPI presentation, we will explain the goals of the workshops and ask for their voluntary consent to participate. Parental participation includes completing a short background survey and engaging in a 30 to 45-minute presentation about how to prepare academically and financially for college. All participating families will receive a \$20 gift card as compensation for their time. Some families will be offered the opportunity to open a FDIC-insured college savings account (i.e. U.Fund, the Massachusetts 529 savings account).

WHAT DOES AN ECPI PRESENTATION COVER?

The workshops discuss how to prepare academically for college and give basic facts about financial aid. All presentations also discuss the importance of saving for college and introduce the U.Fund, which is the 529 College Savings Plan designed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to give families a beneficial way to save for college. Some of the parents will also be given assistance and incentives to help them open a college savings account.

WILL ALL OF MY PARENTS GET THE SAME THING? WHY OR WHY NOT?

The goal of ECPI is to make all families better off from participating. However, to better understand what are the *most effective* ways to help families, we will vary the exact workshop received by parents. Some parents will be given more detailed information about preparing for college while others will get a shorter presentation but will be offered assistance with the college savings application. Some parents may

also receive additional incentives. ***Regardless of which intervention they receive, all parents will have a valuable presentation about how to prepare for college and a \$20 gift card for their time.***

HOW WILL YOU DECIDE WHICH PARENTS GET WHICH INTERVENTION?

We will randomly assign parents into one of three groups. Given the fact that we cannot give offer all families the same treatment, random assignment is the only fair way to decide. Random assignment, which is similar to a lottery, has become more common in schools with limited resources or admission slots. It is used often in research experiments to provide the gold standard of evidence on what types of interventions are the most effective.

HOW HAVE PARENTS REACTED TO THESE PRESENTATIONS AND RANDOM ASSIGNMENT?

Similar workshops were conducted at high schools in Ohio during 2009 and 2010. Parents responded overwhelmingly positive to the presentations, and we did not receive any complaints about varying the type of intervention by family. In fact, parents just seemed thankful to receive the information and the \$20 gift card for their time. Based on our experience, most families have grown comfortable with the idea of lotteries for larger prizes as long as everyone receives something. When deciding to move the project to Boston, we took into account lessons learned from the Ohio experience to try to maximize the benefits to Boston families.

WHY WOULD MY SCHOOL COMMUNITY WANT AN ECPI PRESENTATION?

ECPI is designed to benefit all families that participate. The event may serve as a culminating summary of information you have already covered with families, a programming component you have not had time to plan, or a launching pad for future discussions regarding preparing for college in terms of both academics and financial aid. However it fits your community, the information is important and the resources we will provide are useful.

WHO DOES THE PRESENTATIONS?

Our presenters are trained counselors from Harvard, uAspire, and MEFA. The members of the team all have extensive experience working with students and their parents.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES THIS TAKE?

We estimate that an event program will take from one hour to an hour and a half. We would reserve two hours of room time to make sure that set up and wrap up are completed.

WHEN ARE ECPI PRESENTATIONS SCHEDULED?

The ECPI team knows that scheduling events can be difficult, especially when it comes to setting a time that parents are able to attend. We will work with you to find a time that works for your community. ECPI is also able to schedule multiple presentations at your school to provide more flexibility for parent schedules.

MY STUDENTS' FAMILIES ARE REALLY PROTECTIVE OF THEIR PRIVACY. WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR INFORMATION RELATED TO THIS PROJECT?

All information from this study will be kept private and protected from unauthorized use. Parents who choose to participate will be immediately given an anonymous identification number. All documents related to this study will use this ID number rather than the family's name. All original documents with the family's name will be stored in a secure location at Harvard University. If a parent should decide to open a U.Fund account, their application will go directly to MEFA, the state organization responsible for processing U.Fund accounts, and Fidelity, the financial service responsible for opening the account.

I'M ALREADY SWAMPED. HOW MUCH WILL THIS ADD TO MY WORKLOAD?

It is our intention to provide useful information for your families regarding planning for college without adding to your workload. If you are interested in having an ECPI event for your school community, it should not demand work on your part after our initial meeting to set up logistics for the event.

WHO PAYS FOR ECPI?

ECPI is funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. There is no cost to your school or to any of the parents who chose to participate in the program and the research. The grant covers the cost of the parent gift cards and initial deposits in some of the college savings accounts. The grant also covers the cost of event materials and refreshments.

WHAT CAN MY SCHOOL LEARN FROM ECPI?

By surveying your parents, we hope to learn about how they are preparing for college and their awareness of financial aid concepts. After an event, we can produce a summary report of this information to help you better understand the needs of your families.

HOW WILL MY SCHOOL BENEFIT?

Consider ECPI one program you can offer your community that complements your current programming and requires little to no work on your part. The reward to your families could be substantial.

WHAT DO I DO TO SCHEDULE AN ECPI EVENT AT OUR SCHOOL?

You know your community best. The ECPI team will work with you to determine the ideal date for your program, the best way to contact your community's families to invite them to participate, and all necessary arrangements to have a successful event. After the initial meeting to set things up, you are welcome to be as involved (or uninvolved) in the event as you would like.

At your convenience, please call or email:

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